TL 2539

Statement on East Timor delivered to the Fourth Committee

of the United Nations General Assembly

James Dunn
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

I am honoured to be speaking before the Committee of the United Nations that has played such a vital role in freeing a large percentage of the world's population from the bondage of colonialism. One of the most tragic episodes in the long process of decolonization that has been going on since the end of World War II is the case of East Timor, a territory with which I have had a long association - covering almost two decades. As Australian Consul to the province in the early sixties, I was able to observe a traditional form of colonialism in action under the rule of Salazar's Portugal. I was sent to the colony as a member of a fact-finding mission in mid-1974 to assess what was likely to happen as a result of the policies of Portugal's new government, following the April coup in Lisbon, and in October and November 1975, during the Fretilin interregnum and before the Indonesian invasion, I led an aid mission to the territory. In 1977, at the request of several Australian aid agencies, I interviewed refugees who had managed to get out of East Timor and obtained refuge in Portugal.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Today, I am speaking as a private petitioner, as President of the Human Rights Council of Australia and as Senior Foundation Fellow of the University of Adelaide. My petition is directed at the gross violations of human rights that has been perpetrated against the Timorese people. In the name of integration, East Timor has been forcibly annexed, and its people subjected to a degree of suffering almost without precedent in the history of decolonization. The violations to which they have been subjected to are clearly forbidden by the U.N. Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and U.N. resolutions concerning the rights of non self-governing peoples, to mention only a few.

I have been in a position to watch the unfolding of the tragedy of East Timor over a long period of time, and for six years, I have urged that the

people of this small and remote territory be accorded the right to determine their own future, one of the most fundamental and rigorously observed of mankind's basic rights.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

East Timor has been described as a very underdeveloped country which could never become economically viable. Indeed it is underdeveloped, but thanks to a greater effort in the field of education by the Portuguese colonial adminstration, by 1974 it had developed an educated elite of sufficient size to provide the basis of self-government. The land itself was poorly developed, but with its rich mountain valleys, its extensive plains at Maliana and Lautem where cattle grazing and farming was being developed, it would not have taken much for East Timor to have become self-sufficient in food, with favorable prospects for export. There were also encouraging indications that East Timor might eventually become an oil producer, with prospects for the exploitation of other metals, such as copper. It also had an excellent opportunity to develop a tourist industry, based on the already well-established links with Darwin and Adelaide. In short, in a period of, say, five years for decolonization, East Timor might easily have been one of the more successful cases in the post-war history of decolonization.

As the situation has turned out, the Timorese have already been cynically denied any opportunity to have a say about their own future. When I was in East Timor in mid 1974, it was already clear that of the three options that were being offered then by the Portuguese adminstration, at least 90% would come out in favour of independence, which by September of the same year had become the objective of UDT as well as Fretilin. Mr. Chairman, it seems incredible that this option which has been taken for granted in the case of almost all other former colonies was blatantly disregarded in the case of East Timor.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

It is now just over five years that East Timor's troubled times began. If distinguished members of this Committee were to conduct a careful examination of what has happened in East Timor during that time, I believe that the world body would never accept that this most serious violation of human rights be allowed to drift unheeded into history.

In the first place, let me clarify key facts in this matter. Based on my interviews of UDT leaders themselves, it is clear that the civil war between Fretilin and UDT was the direct result of Indonesia's meddling. At a time when the Portuguese adminstration was weak and divided, as part of a deliberate operation, euphemistically called "Operasi Komodo", an Indonesian group, led by Major General Ali Moertopo deliberately sought to destabilize the situation in order to bring the two parties in favor of independence into conflict. Furthermore, based on my research and experience in East Timor prior to the Indonesian invasion, there is irrefutable evidence that the Indonesians themselves intervened militarily when the Fretilin party emerged victorious from the civil war simply to prevent the latter from gaining legitimacy. At the same time it was Indonesian intelligence that created the fiction that Fretilin was a Communist party and a threat to her security. The entire situation at that time was clearly deliberately falsified by Indonesia in order to justify to her ASEAN neighbours, to her Western friends and to the world community in general, her real aim of acquiring East Timor in complete disregard of the wishes of its people. It was a grave abnegation of their responsibilities that countries like the United States and Australia, who had at least an inkling of the real situation, apparently accomodated Indonesia's devious objective.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Let me now turn to an even more serious aspect of this tragic affair -

that is what has happened in Timor during the past five years. I have carefully studied this situation, based on my interviews of hundreds of Timorese who have managed to leave the country and many other sources of information, including some from within Indonesia itself. There is now so much evidence that the Indonesian occupying forces have behaved brutally and rapaciously towards the Timorese people and that they have been directly or indirectly responsible for a loss of life of genocidal proportions, that the allegation can no longer be refuted. No one can know the real figure but according to a number of authoritative sources from within East Timor itself, somewhere between a third and a sixth of the population has perished during these past five terrible years. And let me make it clear here that in the fighting between Fretilin and UDT, which lasted only one month, the total loss of life, according to the ICR mission leader and the ACFOA mission (which I led), was between 1,500 and 2,000. Again and again, accounts of this senseless killing have been brought to the attention of this committee, so it is hardly necessary for me to repeat them.

The list of violations has become very long indeed. Hundreds of Timorese have been executed without trial, women have been raped and goods, including humanitarian relief supplies, have been looted by the undisciplined troops of the occupying power. These cases have been investigated and reported by Amnesty International, by journalists and even by concerned Indonesian citizens. I have investigated some of them myself.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Let me assure you that the sources of this information are, by and large, ordinary Timorese without political affliation to Fretilin. They are people who are still in a state of bewilderment at an experience they cannot understand.

Since the revelations of last year by the Australian journalist, Peter Rodgers, and by Church sources of the grim humanitarian situation in East Timor,

there has already been a more effective programme of assistance, especially through the International Red Cross and the Catholic Relief Service teams who are now allowed to operate in the territory. As gratifying as this may be, it is only one part of the problem of East Timor. The other compelling human rights aspects of the problem deserve our urgent attention. Recent letters from East Timor, and the remarks of recently arrived refugees provide convincing evidence that the vast majority of the Timorese remain hostile to the integration and regard themselves as a community under military occupation. According to one recent letter from East Timor, "if 90% opposed integration in 1975, now the figure would be 99%."

The courageous Fretilin resistance has clearly subsided in the past two years that we have recently received information that the armed resistance is still going on. Only four months ago, Fretilin guerillas attacked the capital Dili itself, and inflicted some casualties on the Indonesian forces. I was disturbed to learn, Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates, that the Indonesian military subsequently summarily executed four Timorese, apparently as a reprisal. The continuing occurence of such grave travesties of justice and other forms of oppression such as restrictions on freedom of movement are grim reminders that today, five years after the beginning of Indonesia's military intervention, the suffering of the people is by no means confined to food shortages and economic dislocation. Then there is the problem of the reuniting of those Timorese families divided by the events of August 1975. More than two years have passed since an agreement was reached between the Indonesian and Australian governments to allow for the exit from East Timor of over 600 relatives of families in Australia. So far only about half of this number have been allowed out and in nearly all cases, the Timorese in Australia have had to pay heavy bribes to secure the release of their relatives in East

Timor.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates:

I submit that the extent to which the Timorese have been made to suffer during these past five years emphasizes the importance of striving for a solution to this question which will not compromise the right to self-determination. As the U.S. State Department's Senior Legal Adviser testified to Congress in 1977, as that right has never been exercised, it still in fact exists. At this particular time, a rigorous stand by the United Nations might well open up the possibility of a just settlement to a tragic episode which has received so little attention from those nations of the world who claim that human rights is a central component of their foreign policy.

For many members of the United Nations, the experience of East Timor should have a special significance. It is, after all, a story of how a small, vulnerable, economically weak and strategically unimportant community can be ruthlessly sacrificed in the international power game. The upholding of the rights of small states and territories like East Timor is an acknowledged vitally important role of the United Nations. Therefore, however late the hour, to discard the rights of the people of this territory would constitute a dismal end to a shameful chapter in the story of decolonization.

In the circumstances, Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates, the new Portuguese initiative deserves to be welcomed and supported. It would also seem a propitious time to revive the proposal to dispatch a U.N. mission to East Timor, with free access to all parts of the territory and to the Fretilin groups with the aim of preparing a detailed report on the situation.

Thank you.